

Improving Savings and Health by Maintaining Your Home at a Ready-to-Sell Level¹

Randall A. Cantrell²

Quick Facts

- More than 14% of U.S. residents relocate on an annual basis (Avrick, 2011).
- The average cost to prepare a home for sale is approximately \$2,000 (Manchester, 2011).

Terms to Help You Get Started

- **Home:** The house, the land where it is sited, and the occupants residing therein.
- **Overall Home Performance:** How well the house, its land, and its occupants function to maximize resources.
- **Minor Conservation Measures:** Largely related to lower-costing mechanical upgrades and/or behavior modifications.
- **Maintenance:** Actions that are executed on a routine basis in order to prevent repairs from occurring.
- **Family Operations:** Routines and behaviors that are practiced at home by the occupants.

Keywords

Home performance, home-occupant behavior, home maintenance, family operations, home finances

Introduction: The Rude Awakening Involved with Selling Your House

We never know when the market will allow for bidding wars on the price of homes, which was the case in some areas before the recent housing crisis. Similarly, we never know when we will have to make a decision about whether or not to move our family. I experienced both of these scenarios. I purchased my home “as is” in 2004 for the full asking price because I was advised that a bidding war would occur the day the house was listed for sale on the market. The home was well maintained during the seven years when my family occupied it. However, I was offered a job at the University of Florida and decided to return my family to Florida, which was home for the family. When we listed my home for sale during 2011, few potential buyers visited because many other homes were on the market at a similar price and were already staged for sale. Staging is an activity that typically occurs prior to the time of sale in order to maximize visitor (potential buyer) activity. However, if a home is maintained in a semi-staged state, the benefits can far outweigh the costs. My family finally staged the home, and it sold, but not before money was invested to stage it.

This story shows that there is a benefit to keeping your home in a semi-staged state or at a “ready-to-sell” level. This EDIS series of publications will provide you with information about how improving your home’s overall performance can help you improve savings, health, and

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2. Randall A. Cantrell, assistant professor, Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences; Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

happiness. This publication reviews ways to maintain your home at a ready-to-sell level, which can be a benefit if you have to sell your home or relocate your family. Other publications in this series include the following:

- *Improving Savings and Health through Minor Conservation Measures in the Home* (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1320>)
- *Improving Savings, Health, and Happiness by Modifying How the Family Operates the Home* (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1322>)
- *Improving Savings Health and Happiness by Making Small Modifications to Your Home* (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1323>, for an academic audience)

How Can Your Family Benefit from Improving Your Overall Home Performance?

The concept of overall home performance has much to do with re-thinking how we can be happier, which is not necessarily synonymous with being comfortable. Finding ways to keep our family members together under the same roof and in a relatively peaceful state is no easy task. Many families may decide to spend extra money on the family rather than paying for unnecessarily excessive costs of maintaining a home. This is understandable because keeping the family together and happy is a good goal and worthy of pursuit. If families focus on the various factors comprising their overall home performance, there exists the real possibility of creating financial savings for the family as well as having more discretionary time. However, improving home performance sometimes takes place in small increments. It often requires extended periods of time before the benefits are truly noticeable.

Which Maintenance Items Can Help Improve Your Overall Home Performance?

Respondents from a representative sample in the United States were asked to rate multiple items—as identified in the literature—that could improve the overall performance of a home (Cantrell, 2012). The goal was to determine which of 81 items the respondents thought had the greatest likelihood of improving the remaining 50%–60% of their home's overall performance. Within the Maintenance Category, they chose 18 of 27 practices. Although

maintenance practices were categorically found to be a statistically non-significant factor for increasing the overall performance of the home, they are pivotal for saving time and money when the home needs to be prepared for sale. Perhaps because some home occupants believe they can deal with that scenario if it should occur, they are complacent in properly maintaining their home before some element of the home fails.

Maintenance Practices That Can Potentially Improve Savings and Health

Lists 1 and 2 show the maintenance practices that the sample participants felt could most likely improve the overall performance of their homes (these practices were most reflective of improvements to the family's savings and health). Please note that all of the items contained in the lists are unranked and not in any order of priority. The implementation timeframes are listed so that readers can gauge how soon they can realistically hope to make these types of modifications within their home.

List 1. Nine Maintenance Practices to Consider Implementing during the Immediate to Short Term

- Ensure that the front entranceway is well lit and clear of obstructions, such as webs, nests, hives, etc. A clear front entranceway is inviting and safe.
- Provide a welcome mat at the front entrance to the house. Welcome mats keep people from slipping and floors clean, while also reflecting the character of the home. The character of the home often affects the unconscious first impressions that visitors to the property create and sometimes retain regardless of future improvements done to the property.
- Ensure that the mailbox displays the address with reflective numbers. A properly maintained mailbox can help the fire department verify the location of the house while also reflecting the home's character.
- Ensure that parked cars appear neat, orderly, and well maintained. Disorderly parked cars can negatively affect curb appeal and can be unsafe. Curb appeal often affects the unconscious first impressions that potential visitors to the property create as they are driving by and observing the home. These impressions often determine whether or not they choose to visit the home.

- Ensure that trees, shrubs, and grass are trimmed. Landscaping keeps the lawn looking maintained, provides drainage (if vegetation is sloped away from the house), and gives the home curb appeal.
- Ensure that all fences are not broken, are painted, and have working gate latches. Working gates are for safety, privacy, and curb appeal.
- Ensure that any screen or storm door is in proper tension for opening and closing. Proper tension in screen and storm doors saves energy and can prevent injuries.
- Ensure that there is a doorbell in proper working order. Functioning doorbells help to ensure that adults can hear children who cannot knock hard enough to be heard.
- Ensure that there are doorstops behind doors. Doorstops prevent wall damage. (Be aware that doorstops can pose a choking hazard for infants.)
- Ensure that trees are free of any dead branches or limbs. Trees and branches can be a safety hazard to the roof and occupants.
- Ensure that the back porch, patio, or lanai is uncluttered. Cluttered home recreation areas can be a safety hazard and lack curb appeal.
- Ensure that exterior lights turn on and off automatically based on the level of daylight by installing photocell sensors, which enable the switch to be left in the “on” position at all times. This helps conserve electricity.

List 2. Nine Maintenance Practices to Consider Implementing during the Short to Long Term

- Ensure that there are minimal amounts of green grassy areas. Minimizing green grassy areas can reduce the need to use pesticides, fertilizers, and/or irrigation (which consumes drinking water in many instances).
- If there is a deck, ensure that its boards are flipped, its screws are fastened, and it is sealed. Caring for deck boards can reduce wear and injuries caused by nail pops.
- If there are deck guardrails, ensure that they are spaced according to building codes. Properly spaced deck rails can reduce the chances of infant strangulation.
- Ensure that the roof is free of loose, wavy, streaked, or faded shingles. Caring for roof shingles can reduce the chances of roof damage and improves curb appeal.
- If there is a garage, ensure that its door is sturdy and clean. A strong garage door is safer during wind events and can improve curb appeal.
- Ensure that ceiling-fan blades are balanced and dusted. Balanced blades can reduce wear on the fan motor bearings, and clean blades can reduce the amount of dust particles emitted into the air.

Summary

Maintenance alone will not necessarily result in instant improvements in overall savings and health. However, when combined with other home-performance measures (e.g., minor conservation measures and family operations), the results will become more noticeable over time. The point is not to seek instant results but rather to establish a lifestyle that naturally gravitates toward conserving and optimizing resources.

Disclaimer

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